



HE SHALL BE CALLED...

— 2018 Advent Devotional —

Awana®



For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

— Isaiah 9:6, ESV —

I am writing today from Vietnam. This country is beautiful. Tropical. Abounding in sunshine and scenery that catches your breath. But my time here has also been very sobering.

My team and I visited the War Museum in Ho Chi Minh City. There, woven through the war machines—the downed US planes, tanks, and transports—is the story of war. Room after room depicts torture methods used on prisoners and dead bodies decimated by Agent Orange and bombs. Propaganda posters cry out for blood and victory.

We visited Cu Chi where three stories of tunnels run underground on land pocked by deep bomb craters. The tropical jungle was so thick you could hear a squirrel moving, but your eyes could not spot it even though you knew it was nearby.

Here again were reminders of man's inhumanity to man. We were shown invisible booby traps that when stepped on dropped men to their deaths on floors spiked with three foot impalement spears, spaced strategically for optimum damage and death.

After only three days our sickened souls were crying out for relief.

My team and I were experiencing the condition of the hopeless world. Can you imagine what it was like before Jesus was born? Before our Savior came, a sin-sick world, unable to stop the madness of cruelty and barbaric practices, cried out for Him. Human history is a war museum waiting to display your body or your child's body as a trophy, a victory prize in the seemingly unending story of human cruelty.

Made in the image of God, we failed utterly to live up to the *imago dei*. Without His Spirit breathing life into us, we become nothing short of animals. We should never forget that truth, because Jesus' coming changed everything.

When Isaiah prophesied Jesus' coming into our darkness, 700 years before Jesus' birth, it must have sounded too wonderful.

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned ...

For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called

Wonderful Counselor
Mighty God
Everlasting Father
Prince of Peace

Wonderful Counselor. This prophecy perfectly described Jesus, who would subject Himself to an unbelievably cruel death on a cross in order to lift us from our sins and the sins committed against us.

Wonderful Counselor. Jesus' impact on the world would be too wonderful to even imagine, simply awesome. In His name, care and love would characterize His formerly sin-driven, capable-of-every-cruelty followers. Schools and hospitals would be built to bring light to those who still walk in darkness today. Starvation and disease would be addressed in His name. Because of Jesus wells are built, medicines are supplied, hands are held, and hope permeates every human circumstance.

Wonderful Counselor. Show us how to live. Help us follow you closely in our sin-sick world.

Wonderful Counselor. Shine Your light in the darkness and begin with the darkness in me.

Wonderful Counselor. You are awesome.

Wonderful Counselor. You are our hope.

Wonderful Counselor. What seems too good to be true is found in You.



Made in the image of God, we failed utterly to live up to the *imago dei*.



The world's last chapter is not its wars or museums to human depravity. The world's last chapter is still being written. It begins and ends with Jesus, with a whole lot of awesome written on the pages because of Him.

Wonderful, awesome, beyond description Counselor, light-in-the-darkness Jesus.

We love you.

Valerie Bell
CEO of Awana



Questions for You:

- In what ways are you living in darkness today? What seems just too horrible, too cruel, yet too true?
- How have you seen Jesus be a wonderful counselor in your life or the world?

Questions for Kids:

- When have you encountered something "wonderful?"
- In what ways is Jesus wonderful?
- How did Jesus' coming change the world?



MIGHTY GOD

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For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

— Isaiah 9:6, ESV —

In the midst of Israel's exile from the Promised Land, the prophet Isaiah acted as a mouthpiece for God, delivering an important message: the rejection Israel has faced will end. Throughout several chapters in the book of Isaiah we read about the promise God made, not just to Israel, but to all who confess Jesus as Lord. It is a promise to fulfill the plan of eternity, constructed in the imagination of God because of His deep and true love for His beloved creation. It is in these chapters, as Isaiah describes the arrival of Jesus, that he talks about the name of this child to come:

*"...His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
(Isaiah 9:6, ESV)*

Mighty God?! Is this true? Can it be?

From Scripture, as well as from the standpoint of history, we understand that God the Father is mighty. After all, He spoke all creation into being.

He crafted Adam from dust and breathed life into his form. God sent the cosmos into orbit, placed each and every star and planet. He crafted the heights of the heavens and the depths of the deep. According to the book of Job, God the Father laid the very foundations of the Earth into place. There is no question about the strength of God in our minds—or those of Israel in the time of Isaiah.

Sometimes it's easier to say something than to actually mean it. After all, it's one thing to understand something to be true; it's quite another to believe truth, especially in a way that affects our behaviors and actions. This might have been especially true for Israel.

In the days of the prophet Isaiah, Israel was a small nation held captive by Babylon, a world superpower. They were subject to foreign rule, pagan customs, and unholy beliefs. Israel's ability to follow their God in their way according to their convictions and customs all but vanished under the seemingly all-

powerful fist of the strong Babylonian superpower. Would they ever be free again to worship and live according to the truth of the One True Living God?

The answer, of course, was and is "Yes!" The Mighty One would come and we would know Him as Jesus. Yet Jesus doesn't arrive in a mighty way. Surely this mighty Messiah from God would come in the storm clouds or amongst a huge army. He might appear in full power as a conquering king or at least born into a powerful legacy.

But that wasn't what God had planned.

The Mighty One was born a small, helpless baby in a backwater town called Bethlehem. He wasn't of great fame or wealth; His parents couldn't even get a decent room for His birth. Yet in a lowly stable, to a young mother and a confused but faithful blue-collar carpenter father, was born the promised Mighty One, the Messiah Jesus.

Perhaps He would be like Samson and become mighty and physically strong? No. Perhaps like Solomon, Jesus' might would come from His wealth? No, there is no mention of earthly wealth or even a physical home for this son of a carpenter. Maybe, just maybe, He would be like David and slay a giant, or lead an army, or even prove Himself by killing a bear or lion? That wasn't what God had in mind either.

Jesus, our Mighty One, never took on an army, commanded a band of soldiers, or held political office. Jesus, the Mighty One, left His heavenly home along with its power and perfection to come to our lowly place in order that through surrender, our Messiah, our Promised One, might show His ultimate strength.

Perhaps this is best summed up in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:4-11, ESV)

Michael Handler

VP of Brand and Messaging



Questions for You:

- God's version of mighty didn't look like the world's version. What other ways in your life or in Scripture has God's version of things (power, wealth, leadership, etc.) not resembled our expectations?
- What are some ways Jesus demonstrated His might that would be in line with the Philippians 2 passage above?

Questions for Kids:

- What is the mightiest or strongest thing you can think of? What makes it so strong or mighty?
- Is Jesus mightier than those things? Why and how do we know?
- What is one good surprise that has happened in your life? Describe to someone how it made you feel. Think about the good surprise Jesus was and is to the people of God.



EVERLASTING FATHER

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— Isaiah 9:6, ESV —

The term “father” carries so many different connotations. For some, it’s a term of comfort and joy that has been developed over time and forged by a loving and caring relationship. For others, it’s a vast well of deep sadness that drips with pain and wounds that never seem to heal. For still others, the term is a great mystery, as the presence of a father has always been missing in their lives.

The fatherless epidemic sweeping our world is enormous. The primary need in a child’s life right now is not better education, material possessions, or access to wealth. The number one need, proven to make a difference beyond anything else, is the active presence of a loving and caring adult. During

this Christmastime, when our thoughts point to the incarnation, we can see vividly why the Son of God ushered Himself into the world through a family.

Our Advent passage in Isaiah contains the great announcement of Hope to the world — and there is Hope in this message for everyone. The child who already finds joy and love in the arms of a father recognizes here a love that will never depart. The child whose life bleeds with the scars of betrayal and mistrust finds here a Father who will bring comfort and healing. And the child who wanders this world alone and rejected finds a Savior who will never leave, born for us this day in the city of David, now seated on a throne that will have no end.

Our Savior has these divine qualities that set Him apart from our expectations and experiences. It's interesting that Isaiah calls the Messiah "Everlasting Father." Even though Isaiah isn't writing with a complete understanding of the Trinity (he's not saying that God the Father and God the Son are the same person), he illustrates that Jesus will display these divine qualities—just as we see Jesus doing in the Gospels.

Jesus is kind, compassionate, principled, a leader. He expresses care and concern and calls disciples to Himself. He takes up the mantle of the misfits, the downtrodden, and oppressed. He is courageous and, as the Scripture describes Him, filled with grace and truth.

Jesus is the perfect Father, and the whole world is invited to His table. He is without end, everlasting. His presence cannot be erased by death. His impact cannot be silenced by the neglect and stain of sin. His kingdom will be filled with adopted heirs.

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**[Jesus] takes up the mantle
of the misfits, the downtrodden,
and oppressed.**

This is tremendous Hope for our broken and decaying world. During the next few weeks, as we prepare our hearts for the celebration of Christ's incarnation, may we thank and worship our everlasting Father, and may our hearts continue to crave and desire His eternal impact.

Rev. Chris Marchand
VP Partner Solutions



Questions for You:

- How would your kids describe you as a parent? Take a moment and ask them.
- Who needs your fatherly influence in their life right now? One of your children's friends, a child who lives on your street? A child who needs to be sponsored somewhere in the world?
- Your influence is finite, but God's is eternal. How are you preparing your children (biological or spiritual) to thrive as disciples of Christ when you are no longer able to be with them?

Questions for Kids:

- What do you think God is like? Can you list some words that describe Him? Use this as an opportunity to talk about Jesus being our Everlasting Father.
- What is the most important thing a father can do for his children?
- What is something that your father does that you wish would never end?



PRINCE OF PEACE

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— Isaiah 9:6, ESV —

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

— Luke 2:13-14, KJV —

When Jesus, the *Prince of Peace*, was born, His Father sent a birth announcement. His celebratory message declared glory to God and peace to the earth, and it was delivered to a handful of shepherds working the nightshift in the fields.

Peace on earth. That's what God said Jesus' birth was about.

But what does it mean? Peace seems hard to come by — then as well as now.

Someone else went by the name *Prince of Peace* in those days — Caesar Augustus. Caesar also called himself "Son of God," "King of Kings," and "Savior of the World."

So when God, the true King of Kings, announced the birth of His Son, the *Prince of Peace*, to the subjects of the powerful Roman Empire, this was kind of a big deal. Anyone listening would hear a strikingly subversive statement: the real Prince is in town, and His Kingdom is *exactly not* like the kingdom of Rome. Time to choose your allegiance.

A move like this probably will not result in peace right away.

So how does Jesus' birth bring the peace God's announcement proclaimed?

You're probably acquainted with our theme verse for Advent, the famous passage in Isaiah 9 foretelling

the birth of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace. But are you familiar with what comes before?

Isaiah 8 ends with these words: *Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness* (v. 22, NIV).

If I'm honest, this sounds more like the world I know. The word *peace* shows up on everything at Christmastime — in our songs, movies, and decorations — but too often it seems just a word we toss around, like a Christmas throw pillow to set the mood and then store away. Is Jesus' peace really here, living and active on the earth? Peace sounds idyllic during the holidays, but unreasonable in this world of darkness.

Then and now, our earth is wracked with pain, sickness, and death. Division, gossip, anger, disdain, prejudice, and fear envelope us in utter darkness. No one needs to be convinced that something is off kilter in our lives, our families, our kingdoms. We know how dark darkness can be.

But don't stop reading at Isaiah 8:22. If you turn the page to Isaiah 9, there is a wonderful word: "Nevertheless."

Isaiah continues: *The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land*

of deep darkness a light has dawned ... For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given ... (v. 2 and 6, NIV)

The *peace* that the true *Prince of Peace* brings to this world of darkness and pain is so much bigger and more subversive than anything we could put on a cookie or ornament. Jesus' peace is rooted in the truth of God's Kingdom and how it stands in contrast to the injustice and greed of the world's kingdoms. This peace is not quiet, weak, or naïve; it is ready to take on all the pain and suffering and turn it upside down. God's peace is rooted in the truth that in the darkness He brings light; in the coldest season He brings comfort; in a world of suffering He brings joy; and in a time of despair He brings hope.

God's Kingdom has begun its peaceful takeover, calling Jesus' followers to love friends and enemies, to live without fear even as we lay down our lives in service to anyone in need; to serve the Prince of Peace and bring His Kingdom here even as we wait for Him to come again.

Are you overwhelmed by the world today? My prayer is that during this week of Advent you will meet the true *Prince of Peace* — and join His earth-shattering Kingdom, already set in motion.

Catherine McNiel
Senior Writer



Questions for You:

- How does peace sound out of step with your experience of the world?
- How does following the Prince of Peace put you at odds with the world's kingdoms?
- What are some tangible ways you, your family, and your church/club can spread the good news of God's peace and His Kingdom during this season?

Questions for Kids:

- When do you feel peace?
- How is peace different from what you normally feel?
- Did you know that when Jesus was born, His Father announced that He brought "peace on earth?" How can you bring Jesus' peace to your family, neighborhood, or school?



IMMANUEL

GOD WITH US

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— Isaiah 9:6, *ESV* —

"... She will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')."

— Isaiah 7:14, *NIV* —

One of my children is especially cautious. Any time we encounter an intimidating situation, whether a busy parking lot or a visit to the doctor, I've learned to expect her to reach out and grab my hand. Somehow my presence makes the difference. Though she knows getting a shot at the doctor won't hurt any less if I am holding her hand, she needs the comfort of knowing I am right there with her. It makes her willing to be more courageous for the challenge before her.

Imagine what it means that God *is with us*. Unlike a parent who is limited in power and knowledge, God is God. He is present with us as the Divine King —full of power, wisdom, goodness, and love. When we remember that He is with us, it makes all the difference.

But sometimes we are like the child who doesn't reach out for a hand. Isn't that our struggle — to remember that God is with us? We forget that He is present in our greatest times of need, walking with us through brokenness, sin, and fear. It is for this reason God announced through Isaiah that Immanuel, God with us, would come. "... *She will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').*" (Isaiah 7:14, *NIV*)

We read the profound words that describe Jesus taking on human form: "*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us ...*" (John 1:14, *NIV*). He became fully God and fully man and entered our dirty and needy world. The very words of Isaiah's prophecy are echoed in the explanation of Jesus' birth, in case there was any doubt about what was

going on. We read, *"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). (Matthew 1:23, NIV)*

Jesus put on flesh and blood and joined our messy and sinful world to live with us. He laid aside the comfort and joys of heaven to embrace the chilly air and the strong animal smells of a dusty bed of hay. He became the poor son of a carpenter with a questionable history. He was born into an insignificant family during a long journey far from home. He was welcomed into our world by dirty shepherds and restless sheep. He came as a helpless baby to an inexperienced young mother. He was born into a world of violence and captivity. All of this makes Jesus accessible to any of us. No matter who you are or where you are from, this God is the One who is with you.

When Jesus ascended after His resurrection, He left with a clear statement: *"... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20, NIV) We live in this reality, as followers of Christ who trust that He is surely with us always. We cannot see Him, but we trust that God, the Divine King, is with us. We believe the truth He has given us in the Bible, about who He is and His love for us. We trust Him in the circumstances of our lives and look for ways to love Him and show kindness to others. His

presence is what makes the difference when we face unspeakable hardship, because we know it isn't just anyone with us — it is God who is with us.

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Jesus put on flesh and blood and joined our messy and sinful world to live with us.

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As you go about your day, or when you find yourself in one of those tough moments, stop and thank God for being with you. Thank Jesus for how He entered into a messy world to become Immanuel, God with us. Just like a child who knows they need to turn to someone bigger, we can reach for Him and daily draw courage and comfort from His presence. It can make all the difference in our lives too!

Kristin Thompson

Content Manager of Partner Solutions



Questions for You:

- How does it make a difference for you to know that God is with you?
- When we think about Jesus' humility in coming to earth as a baby, how can that influence the way we approach humble tasks as well?
- Who is someone you know that seems to grasp the idea that God is really with them, and what can you learn from them?

Questions for Kids:

- Can you talk about a time when having a parent with you made something you had to do less challenging?
- How could it help someone who worried a lot to know that God is with them?
- Could you describe a time when it helped you to remember that God is with you?